

# **An opinion on the situation regarding the collapsed sections of the Garmouth Viaduct**

It is agreed that the collapsed sections of the viaduct have to be removed and it is not the intention to delay that process. However, there are concern over the way that the project has been handled and decisions made without any consultation and/or input from members of the community who have knowledge of the river and its behaviour. The community want the viaduct removed in a manner that is safe to the contractors and the community. That the works can be carried out with the least disturbance to the environment and the community while giving best value for money, thus the taxpayer.

Link to Moray Council notice of tender for the removal of the collapsed sections of the viaduct  
[https://www.publiccontractsscotland.gov.uk/search/show/search\\_view.aspx?ID=JUL559795](https://www.publiccontractsscotland.gov.uk/search/show/search_view.aspx?ID=JUL559795)

The following are questions that are being raised and may be worth considering. Some may be relevant now, and others may be asked at a later date as and when any enquiry takes place to understand why the viaduct sections collapsed.

1. It is considered that the removal of the collapsed sections should be classed as a demolition contract as opposed to just saying the removal of collapsed sections. The sections of the bridge are still connected to the piers of the viaduct and some sections/spans will have to be separated from the remaining sections. By giving it this job title, it would encourage tenders from companies specialising in demolition work who would have the expertise and heavy equipment to carry out such work.
2. Close-up photographs of the collapsed section show that the piers may not have been undermined by scouring but that, for whatever cause, part of the viaduct has slid off one pier and is lying on top of it. Photographs indicate that the base of the piers is intact and in place. Because of the location of the collapsed section in the fast-flowing part of the river, divers have been unable to enter the water to carry out a full inspection.
3. The collapsed sections are not in the river at its current flow rate. The collapsed sections are not altering the flow of the river, which is guided by the vegetation and gravel deposits it encounters downstream of the collapsed section. The only difference in the course of the river

since before the collapse is that the river is slightly further west upstream of the collapsed sections and continues to follow roughly the course it has done since early 2025.

4. Information from officers suggests that under the current tendering process, those wishing to quote for the contract have to use the methodology put forward under the original Geo-Structural plans. If that is a condition that contractor/tendering companies have to adhere to, it may cause many competent companies not to tender. If the contract to tender for the demolition and removal of the collapsed sections was to be truly open, bidders should be allowed to enter their bid and detail their thoughts on how the contract should be carried out. As a taxpayer-funded project, a range of options and prices should be obtained and considered on their own merit.
5. There is concern that if the tender document is worded so that it restricts those wishing to tender to use the in-place methodology, it could favour the original contractor in the renewed process.
6. There are concerns that the current proposed access route to the west end of the viaduct is unsustainable. The proposed construction site and entrance to it off South Road is very small, requires tight negotiation to get on and off that area (which currently is a community recreation area with mature trees and parking for about 5 cars). Heavy plant and machinery could only safely enter and exit the site from and towards Lhanbryde. It would substantially increase the traffic flow and disturbance to the community.
7. To provide a big enough area for vehicle movements and plant storage, many of the mature trees will need to be removed. That area has a major problem with flooding due to regular blockage of drainage pipes that cross through it from neighbouring fields.
8. There are serious concerns over the stability and structure of the former railway embankment to carry the weight of the plant and machinery required to carry out the demolition and removal of the viaduct as described in the Council handout.
9. The last train crossed that area in 1968. The embankment was constructed in 1864-66 using only locally sourced sand and stones. It is steep-sided with a surface little wider than the axle width of a LGV/large tractor/dumper truck.
10. There is no record of any reinforcing materials having been used in the construction. When the line was in use, regular maintenance included topping up of the hard metal to support the sleepers and rail lines as well as materials to maintain the top of the embankment, which was carried out.
11. The base of the embankment has been exposed to regular flood waters from the River Spey since the viaduct was opened in 1866. It is known that the fine sands slowly wash out of the base of the structure. The walkway surface is clearly seen to drop from the north to the south

side, indicating a movement/subsidence in the base and lower part of the bank. Early records show that there were problems with river water seeping under the embankments during periods of flooding, hence the reinforcing of the south side of the embankment on the east side of the viaduct.

12. Should drilling be carried out to ascertain the integrity and strength of the walkway to confirm that it can carry the vehicles and loads anticipated before, during and after the contract is completed?
13. There are two underpasses in the walkway to the viaduct. These were constructed at the same time as the viaduct and were built to accommodate pedestrians and horse and carts. The width of the walkway at each structure is reduced; thus, engineering works will be necessary to strengthen and widen the top of these underpasses.
14. The width of the walkway at the viaduct is not wide enough to support heavy machinery used to lift the equipment necessary to fit anchoring points of a pulley system to pull the sections clear of the piers or the river.
15. The width of the walkway and its sides will require the importation of materials to and from the working yard to extract the collapsed sections, to cut them up and to load onto trailers/trucks to remove from the site.
16. Provision will have to be made in any quote for the removal of any imported hard core materials used of the temporary work base and restoration of the walkway following the completion of the contract.
17. Has consideration been given to the strength and structure of the walkway to ascertain if it will support heavy loads of construction materials, equipment going out to the viaduct and the removed sections and the final waste material removal from the temporary yard at the viaduct?
18. Will there have to be load transfers between a range of small and larger vehicles at the construction site in South Road? Will that add to the time and therefore costs of the project?
19. Local knowledge and information from individuals with experience in demolition/removal works is that access to the collapsed section of the viaduct would be far easier, more cost-effective and safer by entering the location from Essil Farm/Queenshaugh or across the river from the Speybay side. That route would have no impact on the community. It would allow the use of larger and more robust equipment for the demolition and subsequent removal of the damaged sections.
20. Those routes would require far less use of imported materials to form work bases and construction/demolition traffic movements would not have as much impact on the community as the proposed South Road entrance.

21. There are very strong opinions that the demolition/removal of the collapsed sections would be carried out more efficiently and safely if the river was guided back to its 2021 or even earlier course through/under the main arch of the viaduct. That would allow the removal work to be executed above “dry land”, enable the use of more efficient lifting and cutting equipment as well as the faster, safer removal of the cut-up sections.
22. If the river was guided eastwards to its 2021 course, there would be no requirement for the services of divers to supervise the works. Diverting the river from its current course would allow a full and proper inspection of the base of all piers from the west end of the main arch to the west side of the viaduct. That would assist in determining the probability of a future project to replace the collapsed section. The “drying up” of that section long term would also assist in the construction of the replacement section.
23. The river does meander of its own volition although current courses are partly due to man’s interventions. Rivers can be guided back to former courses by the use of soft engineering practices. The use of armour rock, Gabion cages and any imported materials is not allowed. Washed-down trees and gravel from the former river bed would suffice as construction materials and comply with SSSI restrictions.
24. There are serious concerns about possible and unaddressed consequences when the collapsed sections are removed. A geomorphologist's report should be necessary before any work is carried out to predict where the river will flow when the sections are removed.
25. The river can be guided back to its pre 2021 course very easily and be kept well within its normal flow courses. That is permissible. That could be done by means of a method used by Moray Council in 2012 and including a suggestion made by officers in 2022.
26. As was done in 2012 by Moray Council, gravel could be removed from the east bank upstream of the former Ross House and taken across the river to the west bank. At the same time, washed-out and stranded trees could be staked on the west bank opposite or slightly upstream of the gravel removal. These would be covered with the gravel removed from the east bank. The combination would cause the river to flow from west to east upstream of the viaduct and away from the collapsed sections. These works would not interfere with the natural course/flow of the river nor have any impact on the overall aquatic and land-based environment.
27. Machinery used for that purpose would be the same as that possibly used for the demolition and removal of the collapsed viaduct sections.
28. Owners of property have a legal responsibility to protect their property from flooding. Therefore, Moray Council have a responsibility to protect the viaduct. The legislation allows

works to be carried out even in SSSI areas to protect property. NatureScot have accepted that in the past. Any block by NatureScot can be appealed very easily in the Scottish Land Court.

29. To carry out any works in or near water, a CAR licence is required from SEPA. That licence lays down conditions on what types of vehicles can operate in or near the water. Normally, restrictions are that vehicles and equipment used must not have any oil or fuel leaks and that steps have to be put in place to prevent any pollution of the water course and surroundings. These licences can be altered and renewed/transferred very readily.
30. Allegations of refusal for permission to carry out any works by these two organisations are not sustainable and are probably given as an excuse not to do anything.
31. The latest information is that other than a comment to Garmouth Golf Club that an area of the golf course had been identified that did not flood so could be used as a yard next to the viaduct, no contact has been made with neighbouring land owners re access to and from the collapsed section of the viaduct.

Possible follow-up questions at some other time.

- a) Why did officers ignore warnings submitted by ICC and SEP over the previous three years?
- b) What action was taken, if any, when a report was made in October 2025 that the big wooden beams on the viaduct were moving under the weight of a person?
- c) Why have officers not had full and open discussions with the community to discuss options for the removal of the collapsed sections?
- d) Why, in submitting a brief planning application to Council, has there been no opportunity for members of the public to write in and give their views? For any other planning application from a garden shed to a massive factory, the public always (by law) has the opportunity to submit observations.
- e) Why are Council Officers very reluctant to consider independent reports suggesting a simple engineering structure upstream of the viaduct to push the river back to its pre 2021 course?
- f) Why did officers ignore Council instructions to consult with ICC when Dr Moir's report was put before Council in 2022? Had they listened and taken action then, the collapse would not have happened.
- g) Why have officers ignored the SNH-funded report by Sally Gemmel in 2001 that predicted the current situation?
- h) What contact have officers had with NatureScot and SEPA over the proposals to remove the collapse detections either by way of the current plan or any future plan? SEP took part in a number of meetings facilitated by CES to gain support for the Dr Moir report and the role of

SEP. Neither NatureScot nor SEPA showed an appetite to object to it. Councillor Macrae attended at least one of the meetings, as did Will Burnish.

- i) Why have Council Officers ignored offers from Historic Scotland to have their experts assist in removing and protecting the viaduct?
- j) There are serious concerns about unaddressed consequences when the collapsed section is removed. Surely a geomorphologist's report is necessary before any work is carried out to predict where the river will flow when the sections are removed. From aerial photographs, thoughts are that the river will have a free hand to flow due north and take out part of the golf course, parts of the Fleddie, and come out about Bird Watchers Corner. Over three years ago and before the viaduct collapse, many of us were predicting that as a possible new course for the river, whether the viaduct had collapsed or not.
- k) Questions must be asked as to why officers are extremely reluctant to even consider the question of guiding the river away from the collapse section. According to one contractor considering submitting a tender, he suggested that as a first part of the removal. He was highly critical of the current methodology and said he would not submit a tender if the officers stuck by it as a condition of tendering.
- l) The officers are not looking ahead. Should a decision be made to replace the collapsed sections with some form of walkway, then it will be in the interests of the construction company to be working over dry land. It will facilitate the construction of more solid piers/support legs. Movement of the river course away from its current position would give free access to the piers and their bases.
- m) There are many points that are not being considered due to lack of consultation and discussions with locals who know the river better than anybody else.

The collapse of the viaduct is not just a “Garmouth thing” or a “Moray thing”, it is National. It attracts people to the area. It is a symbol of Moray. It's a method of community interaction, connectivity, communication and travel, directly and indirectly helping Moray-wide businesses and overall social inclusion in the Lower Spey valley

**If anyone has views on the above, or additional knowledge/information about the Spey Viaduct, please email [speyviaduct@gmail.com](mailto:speyviaduct@gmail.com).**